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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MALIKI TO FORM BASRA POST-ELECTION COALITION WITH  
BROADER NATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Classified By: Senior Advisor Gordon Gray for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Leading provincial contacts told Senior Advisor Gordon Gray on January 26-27 that Prime Minister (PM) Maliki's State of Law list will form a post-provincial election coalition on the Basra Provincial Council (PC), including Fadhilah, Iraqi National Accord, National Dialogue Front (NDF), and most likely the leading Sadrists. The alliance was reportedly cemented during Maliki's January 24 Basra visit, following a meeting in the city two days earlier among the PM's representatives, Sadrists, parliamentarians, and provincial officials. Governor Mohamed Wa'eli (Fadhilah) and NDF candidate Ayad al-Abdan outlined slightly different versions of the proposed coalition, while Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) chief Hassim Jodah acknowledged that the PM and the Sadrists would form an alliance on the PC. While contacts could not confirm that the agreement extends beyond Basra, the reconciliation activities carried out by the PM's office and Sadrists strongly suggest, however, that the PM expects the core alliance (Da'wa-Fadhilah-Sadrists) to be a player on the provincial level in other areas of the South. Some Basra contacts believed the nascent, as-of-yet unannounced alliance would even have implications for the national politics later this year. The PM's outreach to the Sadrists is also likely motivated by the PM's need to repair rifts in the Shia camp in the event he requires Sadrists support at the national level to survive a no-confidence move against him. End Summary.

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Alliance: The Governor's Latest Big Idea  
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12. (C) Following the recent defeat of the one-province region formation campaign that he sponsored, outgoing Governor Wa'eli eagerly announced in his meeting with Gray a new direction for his Fadhilah party: an alliance in Basra Province with the Prime Minister's (PM) Da'wa-led State of Law slate, Ayad Allawi's Iraqi National Accord, the two Sadrists slates (Free People's Trend and Integrity and Construction), and the National Iraqi Gathering Project, a coalition headlined by the Sunni National Dialogue Front. The alliance, he said, would be made public shortly after the vote count is announced. If such a coalition were to form, all indications suggest that it would likely command a majority on the new 35-seat Provincial Council (PC). Multiple sources have told the Basra REO that State of Law is likely to gain 8-12 seats, while consensus holds that all the others will gain at least one seat and probably more. The alliance would aim to defeat the ISCI-backed "Martyrs of the Pulpit" coalition list, whose members (otherwise known as the House of Five) hold nearly half the seats on the PC presently.

13. (S/NF) Wa'eli said that the basic outline of the unlikely alliance had been established during the PM's recent visit to Iran, in which the Governor believes Maliki was able to talk to Muqtada al-Sadr. (Note: Other reporting indicates that this meeting did not take place. End Note.) Shortly

afterward, on January 22, a delegation including Sadrists and representatives of the Prime Minister visited local provincial leaders. The Sadrists were parliamentarians Falah Shanshal, Bahaa al-Araji, and Dr. Lek'a Yaseen, and the Basra-based Aqeel Abd al-Husseini. Dr. Fa'al, an advisor from the Implementation and Follow-Up Committee for National Reconciliation (IFCNR), represented the PM's office, along with an unnamed Iraqi Army official from Baghdad. (Note: We have also heard that the IFCNR rep was Dr. Abbud al Issawi vice Dr. Fa'al. End Note). According to Wa'eli, he, along with the PC Chairman and the Police Chief, agree to approve the delegation's request to review cases of Sadrists held in Basra-area prisons. On January 24, the Governor appeared with the PM on his campaign stop, but did not give a public endorsement at that time. Nevertheless, Wa'eli said that the alliance with Fadhilah and the other parties was cemented during the PM's visit.

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IFCNR-Sadrists Road Show?  
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14. (C) While the Governor could not say with certainty that this alliance had been forged in provinces outside Basra, he said that the Sadrists delegation was in the process of visiting other cities with the objective of viewing Sadrists detainee files. Wa'eli said the delegation had already visited Karbala and Amarah and began to review cases, and that it would visit Nasiriyah (Dhi Qar) next. REO staff confirmed with the composition of the delegation and its rough visit schedule with Aqil al-Talib al-Furayji, the spokesman for the Basra PC. The Governor said that no

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decisions have been made yet about Sadrists prisoners in Basra. Neither he nor Aqil suggested that IFCNR was trying to negotiate on behalf of the PM for purposes of establishing a political alliance, but it was made clear that the visit was an essential precursor to reaching an agreement.

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Partial Confirmation  
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15. (C) GEO Director Jodah was less forthcoming than the talkative Governor, but he also said that he had heard that Da'wa and the Sadrists would form a post-election coalition. He acknowledged that these parties were strange bedfellows, given last spring's Charge of the Knights Operation against Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM). Jodah made a point, however, to distinguish the two OMS-backed election lists, which he viewed positively, from the Sadr al-Iraq list, which he referred to as a haven for JAM members. He singled out the Sadrists Free Peoples' Trend list for particular praise, saying that it contained many respected engineers, managers, and teachers. The GEO Director suggested that these Sadrists would not have difficulty working with likeminded technocrats on the PM's slate.

16. (C) Abdan, the leading candidate on National Dialogue Front's (NDF) coalition list, confirmed after some prodding that his party had reached an agreement to align with State of Law (Da'wa), Fadhilah, and Iraqi National Accord. He also said that the alliance would likely be announced sometime shortly after election results are released. Abdan evaded questions about a possible local Da'wa-Sadrists alliance (which NDF would be a part of) and seemed to be uncomfortable with the topic - though he emphasized that he did not discount the possibility. Abdan, while taking a few jabs at the PM (like any good NDF member), strongly praised Maliki for his nationalist tendencies. He described the leading State of Law candidate in Basra, Dr. Shilfaq Abud, as a "secular candidate" and predicted that both Da'wa and Fadhilah would change their names within the next few years to reflect the parties' more nationalist and less religious

orientation. He praised the candidates of all the prospective coalition for their anti-ISCI and anti-Iranian stances.

17. (C) In a separate meeting, Sheikh Amir al-Fayez, leading candidate of the Unity and Justice Gathering, admitted that his party is concerned about a Da'wa-Sadrism alliance, saying "everyone is talking about this now." Fayez, a member of the Law Support Committee, is well respected by a range of Basra leaders, but also has long-standing ISCI ties, which may have precluded his party from being a candidate for a Da'wa-led coalition. Local consensus holds that Unity and Justice will also win at least two seats on the PC.

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Comment: National Implications?  
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18. (C) It remains to be seen if the proposed coalition described by the Governor and others crystallizes; after all, Wa'eli has given us wrong analysis before. The alliance, if it happens, would likely have significant implications both at the provincial and national level. The unusual grouping including Da'wa, OMS-backed Sadrists, and the Sunni National Dialogue Front may not be replicable everywhere in which these three are present, especially Baghdad and Diyala. The reconciliation activities carried out by the PM's office and Sadrism leaders strongly suggest, however, that the PM expects the core alliance (Da'wa-Fadhilah-Sadrists) to be a player on the provincial level in other areas of the South. Both Wa'eli and Abdan view the PM's efforts to form coalitions at the provincial level as a precursor of alliances that will be set at the national level - an assertion that seems likely. The PM's outreach to the Sadrists is also likely motivated by the PM's need to repair this rift in the event he requires Sadrism support at the national level to survive a no-confidence move against him, rumored to be in the works following the provincial elections. Wa'eli cautioned however, that Maliki's effort to exclude ISCI/Badr from alliances at the provincial level does not preclude them from bringing ISCI back into a reconstituted Shi'a alliance before the national elections. Even so, if Dawa comes out on top in the provincial councils of Shia Iraq, it would dramatically change power relations among the Shi'a parties. Such a result would allow Maliki to dictate the terms of the national Da'wa-ISCI partnership to a great degree. End Comment.

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